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COSMOPOLITAN TENDENCIES IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Literature, like every fine art, is an expression of life, and all vigorous human life has some local root. To be truly national a literature must delineate in large and noble forms the real existence of a people, and, no less, the largest hopes and dreams for an ideal future which that present reality may justify. Created always by the few men and women of individual genius, such works have usually also a racial stamp.

Sophocles' *Antigone* is not only a true Hellene, but even a true Attic maiden, — despite her nominal Theban origin. Dante, throughout his twenty years of exile, remained a Florentine to the fingertips, and almost every ghost he meets seems his fellow-countryman, by speech and manners. Even Shakespeare draws *Ulysses* and *Coriolanus* as Elizabethan gentlemen, for he had known no others. Our own most romantic idealist, Hawthorne, has portrayed at least once, in *Hepzibah*, a Yankee as unmistakable, if not quite so angular, as Aunt Ophelia herself.

And yet, in all work which is to abide and retain its value for later men, the universal and purely human element is the largest of all. *Andromache's* wifely devotion, or *Hester Prynne's* self-sacrifice for an infinitely less chivalric man, is a perfectly intelligible appeal to any loving heart, and will always so remain. This must needs be true, since all merely local color soon changes. *Periclean Athens*, or *Savonarola's Florence*, must already be painfully reconstructed by the learned archæologist, or imagined, — less accurately perhaps, but at least more vividly, — by the lighter-hearted romancer. *Hector's Troy* is but a dream, like *Arthur's Camelot*, if either really existed. Whether *Achilles* fought from a four-horse chariot, or *Hector* handled a spear seventeen feet long, we shall never learn. No one now dares criticise *Homer's* accuracy in detail. Perhaps that only heightens our enjoyment of his living men and women. Some assert that the Puritan character, also, or the Yankee dialect, is already extinct. Clearly, then, no work is permanently admired merely for

its local truthfulness; since after a generation or two no one is competent to vouch for that.

It is my intention to speak, therefore, not of any art-product as peculiarly our own, but rather of the contribution made by Americans to that one world-literature which is cherished and handed down from age to age, for its universal truth and lasting beauty, by the common consent of mankind. This is the more fitting, because the twentieth century seems clearly destined to break down all the old barriers, and to bring the remotest isles of the sea closer together than were Boston and Quebec in 1750. Up-to-date railroads will run through the heart of darkest Africa. The mysterious veil of the Orient is being drawn aside like a morning mist. Furthermore, our English mother-speech is striding with gigantic steps toward universal dominance. It is already intelligible to more millions, even of Hindoos or of negroes, than any other tongue. English will soon reach the ear of mankind. Our literary work then, should strive to make effective appeal to a worldwide audience.

But art, though the highest expression of life, can by no means be a constant and immediate record of human effort. Literature, in particular, arrives late. Homer himself asserts that he lived in a decadent age, and it was probably true. So Roman character and achievement had culminated early, in the Scipios; and both Livy and Virgil look back, with bitter regret or sad repining, from a social and political epoch to which they could not be reconciled. One of our own poets has said of ourselves:

On the breathing page
Still pants our hurried past;
Pilgrim and soldier, saint and sage,
The poet comes the last.

It may well be, then, that the best of American literature is yet unwritten. It certainly is true that our contribution to human welfare has been chiefly made, as yet, in more homely forms than art can fashion. Winthrop, Penn, Washington, Fremont, Edison, were — or are — not literary artists. Franklin and Lincoln were far more than mere writers.

Four qualities may be successively traced in literary utterance, and may be used also as a test of progressive enlargement. There

is of course no strict sequence in time. All these tendencies co-existed from the first. Captain John Smith was a true cosmopolite. Few utterances ever had such international importance as Jefferson's manifesto of 1776. Still the four keywords may justify themselves.

Nearly everything we produced for two centuries was *provincial*. We aped British models, and hoped for the condescending approval of English critics. When Cooper began by imitating a poor English novel, by depicting social conditions three thousand miles away and quite unknown to him at first hand, when Dana and his brother-editors felt that "Thanatopsis" was too fine to have been written in America at all, when Miss Sedgwick's ambitious historical novel borrowed from Waverley its sub-title "Sixty Years Since in America"—we were consciously provincial still.

Emerson's Phi Beta oration of 1837 was indeed a "Declaration of Independence." But the response for a whole generation was very largely *sectional*. The terrible condemnation of the national compact itself, which was nailed for so many years to the masthead of the *Liberator*, may have been morally justified,—but to many among our fathers it had become the slogan of instinctive and bitter hatred for everything distinctively Southern. "Uncle Tom's Cabin" will live as a work of genius, of moral inspiration; but surely no one will find in Legree, and his brethren, an expression of personal sympathy or fraternal comprehension. Whittier's shrillest and most partisan notes were the most popular for thirty years before the civil war. Even Hawthorne's local color was wholly of the Northeast. But the best illustration for this paragraph may be drawn from the most famous early utterance of the very man who came to be the accepted poet, in happier days, of a reunited people; or rather of a newly created nation. The first rhyme of "Hosea Biglow" closes with these words:

If I'd *my* way I hed ruther
We should go to work an' part.
Man had ough' to put asunder
Them that God has noways jined;
An' I shouldn't gretly wonder
Ef there's thousands o' my mind.

"Uncle Tom's Cabin" was shrewdly characterized by the great Emancipator himself, when he first stooped to clasp Mrs. Stowe's hand, exclaiming: "And is this the little woman who brought on this great war?" One may indeed devoutly believe that both the romance and the awful civic strife were necessary to the real union of sections, and even to the progress of humanity itself toward true freedom. But by no means all earnest patriotic men then believed that the "divided house" ever would, or could, be truly one.

There is no call to regret, certainly no desire to suppress, the historic record of such intense sectionalism. Lowell himself lived to give the best poetic utterance to the feelings of a generation which saw clearly the decisive truth, "Slavery sectional, Freedom *national*:" but he recanted none of Hosea's utterances.

It is relatively easy now to view as a whole the period in our annals from 1830 to 1870, to perceive its epochal and dramatic meaning. The thirty-five years past since then inevitably share as yet the shadowy vagueness, the distorted exaggeration, of a photographic foreground. But at least the results of the civil war seem fully assured. In the very last years of the century the short struggle with Spain left one happy result, in destroying the last traces of hostile feeling between those who had shared in the more deadly fraternal conflict.

If there be to-day any Separatist feeling, it is rather a real or imagined cleft between East and extreme West. Our gravest political problems — the strife between advocates of gold and silver, the combinations of laborers and capitalists, the tariff questions, the control of the railroads, — have no visible relations with Mason and Dixon's line. The hearty dislike of Yankeeedom by its northern neighbors indeed, largely a sinister legacy from "Tory" ancestors needlessly exiled after the Revolution, remains, and may yet long remain. Throughout the Union the conviction is all but universal, that manifest destiny ordains but one great Anglo-Saxon community, belting the continent.

The latest school of Southern writers, led perhaps still by Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page, are gathering up with filial devotion the fast-fading memories and traditions of their section. But these genial artists, themselves heartily loyal

to the new fatherland, are supported chiefly by a cordial audience in the North and West. All feel with pride that the records of the Old Dominion are simply part of the common heritage. So Hamlin Garland in his sombre gray tints, or Octave Thanet with her healthier optimism, portrays no really sectional Middle West. Rather, revealed more clearly by their art, is seen the steady progressive merging of a dozen alien races in the new American type. All the "local color" in which recent literature is so rich is offered, in the same confident spirit, to the sympathetic millions of real fellow-countrymen.

Still more clearly national in its tendency is the historical fiction of the last decade. The revolution and the civil war, the two fiercest crises of our fate, are naturally seized upon by the most ambitious artists, old or young.

But another notable incident of the closing century was the renewal of natural sympathies and fraternal relations between the insular English and Americans. The consciousness of close kinship had never been lost, was in fact the very cause of the bitterest exasperation on both sides. No man had done more to close this rift than Mr. Lowell. Yet the full reconciliation was delayed beyond his time, was rudely pushed off once more by Mr. Cleveland's Venezuela message, and came at last, with a certain suddenness, under the stress of an urgent mutual need. An amusing record of that abrupt change is still to be seen in the biography of Washington, by an astute senatorial politician, wherein the hasty epilogue recants the Anglophobia which had permeated nearly every earlier page.

Men are rapidly accustoming themselves to the prospect of a close economic union, if not a political alliance, among the English-speaking nations of the earth. The term "Anglo-Saxon" seems hardly wide enough to include the people of Roosevelt, Booker Washington and Andrew Carnegie; and if a racial line is to be drawn at all our latest national guest, Bruder Heinrich, might even bid us speak, rather, of a natural bond among all Teutonic nations, at least. But at any rate the larger international role is assured.

Already the financial "power-house of the line" has moved from Threadneedle to Wall Street. Though Germany has suddenly

forged toward the front in mercantile energy and success, yet her relative loss in population must continue, and practically every migrating family comes to speak English only, even in the second generation. The time is swiftly approaching when our business methods, our political ideas, our language and culture, will dominate the economic, the civic, the social life of the civilized world. When the East Indian poet of the English peoples lay ill in Manhattan, and even the Kaiser, loyal to his British mother's memory, sent his message of sympathy for the man who more than any other had "uttered the feelings of our race," that time seemed close at hand.

The imaginative poet, above all other men, clearly beholds this dreamlike future, foreseeing with prophetic eye, "The Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be." Even the singer of "Locksley Hall," it is true, lived sixty years longer, to see his boldest vision, the "Parliament of Man," fade into doubt and all but despair. This generation seems older, less sanguine, less imaginative, than its grandsires of Burns' or Shelley's day. In America indeed, during the brief literary life on this continent, the imagination has never yet come to its full rights. Yet one may naturally expect, from the days of Franklin to the time of Twain, some occasional foreshadowings of this proud cosmopolitan leadership which seems to-day no mere far-away mirage.

Passing lightly over such crude early glorification of our own national future as Timothy Dwight's "Columbia, Columbia, to glory arise," or the still louder reverberations on the same theme of Joel Barlow's unread and unreadable epic, it will be readily agreed that our first — and probably still our largest — contribution to international citizenship was Benjamin Franklin. Though his *Autobiography* is the only American book, written before 1800, still counted among the hoarded treasures of mankind, Franklin seems at first thought hardly a man of letters.

On the other hand, the shrewd practical philosophy of Poor Richard is clearly prophetic of that thrifty mercantile spirit which may yet make war impossible, which already dictates the combined or divergent action of the nations, in China, in Africa, perhaps all the world over. The long foreign residence and dip-

lomatic career of Franklin, his scientific discoveries and inventions which became the common property of civilized men, above all his large philanthropic spirit, revealed both in theory and in practice throughout his long life, make this creator of libraries and universities, this organizer of police systems and post-offices, this homely inventor of stoves and lightning-rods, the best-known man, probably, in two entire continents, of all who lived in the eighteenth century.

It is an effort to remember, that this great American entered his seventieth year still a loyal subject to King George. He was, indeed, among the last and most reluctant to see the necessity for armed resistance and complete separation. Yet so early as 1760 he wrote the memorable sentence in which one word only need be changed: "I have long been of the opinion that the foundations of the future grandeur and stability of the British empire lie in America . . . broad and strong enough to support the greatest political structure that human wisdom ever yet erected."

This prophecy of Poor Richard is echoed no less sonorously a few years later by the Frenchman Crèvecoeur: "Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world." If a nation so mingled and moulded is now becoming in turn aggressively cosmopolitan, it is but a natural and easy reflux tide. It is returning with matured energy to dominate the original sources of its life.

The Revolution was an event which brought with it world-wide results, and those who played the leading parts seem to have realized much of its importance. In general, political writing and oratory in America has been heroic and virile, free from the provincial timidity which so long marked verse and fiction. Jefferson's fearless essay, which became the manifesto of a struggling people, was avowedly addressed to mankind. Its reverberating echoes have by no means died away. Those generous aphorisms from a slaveholder's pen have already inspired a Webster and a Lincoln. They may be the inspiration of those, yet unborn, who shall fight the battles of a larger economic and social freedom.

In some respects one of the most cosmopolitan among authors was Washington Irving. Though he made his first notable hits with the local legends of the Hudson like Rip Van Winkle, and the broader fun of old Dietrich Knickerbocker, one need not fear to confess that Occidental culture was then too new, or too shallow, for the full sustenance of such an author. To his artistic temperament England and Spain were alike necessities. So it has been later, in varying degree, with Everett and Ticknor, with Longfellow and Lowell. He is surely not the less a patriot and a useful citizen, who most fully realizes himself the heir of all the ages, of all elder art and thought and utterance. These men, however, lived in the days when it was in part the æsthetic poverty and weakness of America that drove its most gifted children to seek other and older centres of life and culture.

Wherever the Anglo-Saxon pitches his moving tent, there is one strain of music familiar and appealing to all. It is not so generally known that "Home, Sweet Home" was originally an air in an opera, on an Italian subject, written by an actor, playwright and musician of Yankee birth. John Howard Payne, himself even more homeless than the rest of his guild, played his varying parts, on the mimic and the real stage, for quite as many years in other lands as in his own. Through England and Scotland, in particular, he wandered long. Death found him at last in Tunis.

The story of our literature includes many other such rovers, from "Virgilian" Barlow, whose adventurous life is far more interesting and romantic than his epic, and who perished at last among the myriad victims of Napoleon's Russian campaign, to merry Hans Breitmann, who till past fourscore still hobnobbed with gypsies, witches, brigands, and archæologists, in the peninsulas of the Mediterranean. Bayard Taylor was perhaps the American most famous as a world-wide traveller.

It is generally felt that the artist is less rooted to his native soil, transfers his spiritual allegiance, especially to Italy, more easily than other men. Benjamin West, Washington Allston, Thomas W. Parsons, William Wetmore Story, and many others, are examples of this migratory instinct. The children of such families, even though born and bred in Florence or Rome, do not,

like exiled Germans, lose their father's speech, but do naturally acquire a certain cosmopolitan nature.

The largest if not the only figure in current literature who sprang from this class, Marion Crawford, counts himself still an American. Yet certainly as a romancer he is least enjoyable when he attempts to portray his fellow-countrymen. We may well imagine that for him "home" rhymes with "Rome," that he habitually dreams in the soft speech of the Tuscan land, and that the hereditary princes of the eternal city are more congenial subjects to him, as they certainly are more picturesque to us, than the financial or social despots of Manhattan and Chicago. When Crawford turns to archæology and history, he is well-advised to linger upon Roman or Sicilian soil. His pleasantly-colored cheerful romances aim rather to give stingless enjoyment than to preach Puritanic doctrine, or even to essay any Hawthornesque insight into the human heart.

Mr. Crawford's most ambitious historical novel, "Via Crucis," reproduces the effect of tumultuous movement, the vivid tints, and the passionate feelings, which may well be true to the age of the Crusades. Even here however the painful learning and conscientious accuracy of George Eliot's "Romola" are either absent or concealed under a lighter touch and method. In general, Mr. Crawford may not be one of the chief leaders in original thought, nor perhaps even in the romancer's art; but he is a thoroughly sane, happy, and, in particular, an international figure of twentieth century life.

Mr. Henry James, the psychologist among novelists, is remote indeed in style and aims from Mr. Crawford. Yet they are much alike in one respect. Both are uprooted, homeless, all but denationalized. The younger artist, Story, and his gifted wife may be regarded as kindred types. For such men and women, who are not few, nor of one race alone, the capitals of Europe, and older cities generally, are as familiar as the various rooms of one luxurious and rambling clubhouse. They share and help on that steady assimilation in which the nations of Europe are intermingling and fusing, as surely and inevitably as a dozen forgotten stocks have already blended in Southern Scotland or Lombardy. They are, however, in advance of, or out of touch

with, the most vigorous movements of present life and thought, which are still essentially national, more than international or cosmopolitan.

Indeed, the deeprooted love of home, the long growth of tender memories about a single spot of earth, should be maintained and strengthened, most of all in our own restless, unsentimental, nomadic folk. He who lacks that tie misses one of the mightiest grounds of appeal to the sympathetic heart of his brother man.

Longfellow's artistic range was wide indeed. The struggle of the old Norse paganism with the hardly less fierce aggression of a nominally Christian propaganda has never been so vividly sketched as in the "Saga of King Olaf." Again, even Monti, the "young Sicilian," of the "Wayside Inn," must have thrilled with delight, when his friend repeated in limpid verse the noblest legend of Palermo, the tale of royal Robert and the angel. Nay, perhaps the heart of the great mediæval age itself is best revealed in the "Golden Legend," as retold by the sweetest of cisatlantic singers. Yet this prince of translators, this interpreter of the universal human heart, is also the central figure in the best-known and happiest of American family groups. From the open window of Craigie House went forth, with so many another helpful word, to the ears of a sympathetic world the strain:

Each man's chimney is his Golden Milestone;
Is the central point from which he measures
Every distance
Through the gateways of the world around him.

So Lowell often speaks of himself as a man who had lived contentedly for half a century in one house on the edge of a village. Holmes in old Boston, Emerson in Concord, were no less rooted to the soil. The loving domestic memories of Whittier's "Snow-bound," the lifelong quest for humble home-happiness in "Evangeline," are precisely the qualities that have given these two an unrivaled position among longer American poems. From the most peaceful of hermitages have come at times strains which may yet be the marching-songs of bolder men of action in a far off future, such as Lowell's "Present Crisis," or Whittier's assurance that

Sometimes gleams upon my sight
Through present wrong the eternal right,
And step by step since time began,
I count the gradual gain of man.

The last phrase recalls how large a share the patriotic historians have taken in making clear the essential unity in the tale of the Western Aryan, and his steady progress over two continents. Irving first told adequately the story of Columbus and his companions. The same pen set forth the services of Washington to his people, to civic liberty, to all men. Prescott's "Ferdinand and Isabella," "Mexico," "Peru," are illuminated chapters in the same chronicle. Motley, in particular, always insisted that the fight for religious and political freedom, whether in the Netherlands, in old England, or in her colonies, was one. That heroic struggle, which Prescott had hardly lived to touch in his "Philip II," Motley portrayed through nine memorable volumes. With all the noble warmth of his partisan sympathies, he is too frank and conscientious to omit any facts which the most adverse critic might wish to use against him. Parkman's tale of the struggle for a new continent will probably never need to be retold. Even he who shall recast in larger philosophic spirit, on the same scale as Bancroft's, the story of the origin, growth and union of the American Colonies, will at least find in the stately volumes of that sturdy Jacksonian partisan a storehouse of data and farsought citation.

All such works are in less or larger degree gifts of loyal Americans to the permanent wealth of mankind. Even an art which, as to its immediate purpose and scope, is so short-lived as oratory, may yet contribute, in a Webster, an Everett, or a Lincoln, to the permanent enrichment of human expression. The unique influence of Ciceronian style over the structure of oratorical prose, in four or five living languages, shows what vital force may yet long survive in the eloquence once heard from Webster's lips by the veterans of Bunker Hill or by the descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers. Here again is illustrated the truth, that fervid patriotism is nowise incongruous with the largest love for mankind. Many believe that Senator Hoar's speech in behalf of Philippine independence will win lasting fame and classic in-

fluence no less than Burke's plea for the American colonists. Mr. Roosevelt's call to the strenuous life, or his historical work on the "Winning of the West," awakes echoes of sympathy far beyond Columbia's borders. Both these fearless and generous opponents have strengthened the belief, that the precepts, the examples, the results of American citizenship and statecraft are of unrivaled importance for the future of all men.

What form that greater future shall take may not even be surmised. As Lowell sings, with Pindaric sententiousness,

Only children rend the bud half-blown
To forestall nature in her calm intent :
Time hath a quiver full of purposes
Which miss not of their aim, to us unknown,
And bring about the impossible with ease.

But it seems certain that, for many a century at least, the efforts toward human happiness and larger freedom must centre in our land. The memories of Franklin, Webster, Garrison, Lincoln, Longfellow, may yet be overshadowed by lives even more beneficent. The most patriotic, philosophic, far-sighted citizen of the republic is also, as yet, the truest cosmopolitan.

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